DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 347 661 EA 024 106

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TITLE School Closings as a Change Process: Buffalo and Jericho, 1976-1981.
PUB DATE Apr 92
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 20-24, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; Community Attitudes; Community Change; Community Cooperation; Community Relations; *Community Support; Elementary Secondary Education; *Organizational Change; *School Closing; *School District Reorganization
IDENTIFIERS *Buffalo Public Schools NY; *Jericho Union Free District NY

ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that examined the effect of school board administrative change strategies on the degree of community opposition to school closing decisions are presented in this paper. The study is based on Kotter and Schlesinger's (1974) conceptual model that identifies six effective change strategies: education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, negotiation and agreement, manipulation and cooperation, and implicit and explicit coercion. The case study of two New York school districts--Buffalo and Jericho--involved document analysis and community surveys. Findings indicate that the districts maintained or heightened community support through utilizing the four strategies of openness (the first four of the six aforementioned change strategies). The two controlling strategies (the final two of the six change strategies) were least effective for managing change. A conclusion is that the strategy of openness, combined with a focus on the improvement of educational quality, was most effective in reducing conflict and increasing support. (LMI)

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SCHOOL CLOSINGS AS A CHANGE PROCESS: BUFFALO AND JERICO 1976-1981

A PAPER PREPARED FOR
THE AMERICAN RESEARCH ASSOCIATION NATIONAL CONFERENCE
SAN FRANCISCO, APRIL 1992

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SCHOOL CLOSINGS AS A CHANGE PROCESS: BUFFALO AND JERICHO 1976-1981

Introduction

Systematic planning for change and the techniques of planning for change were the conceptual basis of this research using Kotter and Schlesinger's (1974) six strategies for effectively dealing with change: education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, negotiations and agreement, manipulation and co-optation, and explicit and implicit coercion. Kotter and Schlesinger's paradigm, although originally developed for business, was a key element in examining change strategies in school districts that underwent school closings. This model also postulated that change produces conflict and that change must be managed if destructive effects to an organization are to be minimized and growth maintained.

In the 1970s and 1980s, school closings were among the most significant examples of conflicts brought about by the need for change. School closings occupied extensive amounts of time and frequently necessitated major expenditures and extensive effort by board and administration. Despite these efforts and expenditures, many districts saw a change in administration and in board members, an erosion of public confidence, and extensive and often bitter factional conflict (Keogh, 1978; McGuigan, 1981; Nocera, 1986; Orloff, 1984; Stinchcombe, 1984). A study of that period to identify the kinds of strategies that were used to defuse conflict resulting from the need for change (in this case, closing schools) was considered important. The experiences of two New York State school districts, Buffalo and Jericho, were analyzed to identify what elements of planned change were most efficacious despite community size, type, or socioeconomic composition.

This research was considered important as an effort to identify whether Kotter and Schlesinger's (1974) techniques for managing change were effective in times of great stress, such as a school closing. If so, then some of these strategies could also be effective in the day-to-day operations of schools as well as in helping to reestablish the close connections between schools and the public at a time that confidence and support seem to be eroding. Public demands for cost containment,

cutbacks in state and federal funding, and changing public perceptions of the quality of education are among the factors producing conflict in American education today. Educators must recognize the need to develop systematic plans for the changes necessitated by the above issues, or else public confidence will continue to erode and conflicts will be exacerbated.

Conflict and Change

The research and literature support the notion that change and conflict are intertwined, and the findings of this current research, by virtue of the separate experiments conducted (Yin, 1989), corroborate the literature. In both Buffalo and Jericho, change involved the closing of schools, which produced conflict. The degree to which the conflict was managed effectively was treated as a separate issue. In addition, the findings of this study indicate that today's school districts, regardless of socioeconomic characteristics, including level of affluence, must deal with change factors that are often extremely divisive.

Some theorists (Berger, 1983, Poster, 1987; Zerdykov, 1983) postulated that open techniques not only did not necessarily produce positive results, but in some cases may even have had negative consequences. On the other hand, there was much research that urged approaches that stressed openness, extensive communication, involvement, participation, facilitation, and support (Bozza, 1985; Buster, 1979; Fredrickson, 1981; Jakes, 1966).

The Problem

In assessing opposition to school closing decisions, to what degree was the level of conflict related to conflict-reducing strategies used by the board and administration in attempting to secure community support? Specifically, what effect did each of six selected strategies have on the degree of opposition to school closing decisions?

In an attempt to isolate the critical ingredients of this study, such variables as the quality of the decision itself, the need for closing, and which building to close, were factored out by selecting districts in which the decision-making process was of equally high quality. An attempt was made

to determine whether empirical data could provide support for researchers and practitioners who believe that techniques of planned change can be generalized to different conflict-causing situations. Furthermore, it was considered important to study whether lessons learned and refined in the heat of real conflict in one district can be used by administrators in other situations, whatever the individual community characteristics

Significance of the Study

The alleviation of conflict over school closings and other educational issues is especially critical because of the need to maintain the quality of programs, to retain support from a public whose orientation is already less than positive, and to uphold staff morale in an era where burnout or alienation has become more pervasive than in previous periods.

In addition, there was a lack of agreement among researchers about the factors that increased or alleviated conflict and the ability to generalize from one district's experience to another district. Indicative of this disagreement were the studies done by Casey (1977) and Eisenberger (1976). Casey believed that closing procedures must be tailor-made district-by-district. Eisenberger, on the other hand, stressed procedures that could be used by many districts. Therefore, this study was an effort to follow up these previous studies, to isolate conflict determinants, and to determine the degree to which models could be developed for use by administrators in different districts.

Finally, few would disagree that the minimalization of the conflict involved in these situations could only result in positive effects for both education and educators. It was considered that this study would also be valuable in that the findings on effective strategies in crisis situations could be used in the regular interaction between community and school and between staff and management.

The Method

An explanatory multiple case study design was developed, using the rigorous case study design outlined by Yin (1989). To overcome "the traditional criticism of the method" (1989, p. 13), Yin emphasized:

1. The unique qualities of the case study approach.
2. A rigorous process, including traditional research criteria, construct validity, external validity, internal validity, and reliability.
3. A careful design and implementation of elements unique to case studies, including a protocol, a data base, and specific techniques for data analysis.

Two unique qualities documented by Yin (1989) are that a well designed case study allows the use of multiple sources of evidence and analysis of real life interactions. Yin pointed out "the case study's unique strength is the ability to deal with a full variety of evidence-documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations" (p. 20). He emphasized that gathering each set of data separately and analyzing the findings is in itself like completing multiple experiments, which further strengthens the findings through corroboration of results.

A case study protocol was designed to ensure that specific steps were followed in all field sites, keeping in mind appropriate questions and techniques for effective interviewing. The protocol included:

1. Researching the literature for refining objectives and procedures.
2. Providing for refinement through the use of a previous study that provided many of the key functions of a pilot study.
3. Detailing the exact steps to be followed in each district, including letters to respondents; the use of informants; the data to be gathered, e.g., documents and archival records; the formal interview and formal survey/questionnaire.
4. The process for data analysis, focusing on analytical generalization as opposed to statistical generalization.
5. The development of a separate data base to further insure quality of the process.

Data analysis included relying on theoretical propositions as the general strategy and using, as dominant modes of analysis, pattern-matching, explanation-building, and time-series analysis (Yin, 1989). The formal questionnaire was a supplementary "embedded unit" that was statistically analyzed. The research design tested the theoretical propositions found in the conceptual rationale

of this study: specifically, to assess the effects of change strategies on the level of opposition in school closings. Pattern-matching included determining which of Kotter and Schlesinger's (1974) strategies correlated most clearly with reduced levels of opposition and whether those strategies supported theoretical constructs that stress openness and involvement (e.g., Theory Y) or authoritarian constructs (e.g., Theory X).

In the explanation-building section of the analysis, efforts were made to see whether a single explanation could be used in each of the situations to predict results, based on the conceptual rationale developed. Finally, a time-series analysis was done, in which relevant events were placed in chronological order and examined for patterns and results.

For brevity of presentation, citations of the numerous original newspaper articles and district archives have been generally omitted. A complete data base of all research sources is available to interested readers.

Comparative Findings: Buffalo and Jericho

Both Buffalo and Jericho experienced declining enrollments and the need to close schools during the same period of time, had carefully and accurately projected population trends, had analyzed the physical conditions of the schools involved, faced major socioeconomic issues, found that building principals played a significant role in school closings, and focused on quality as the primary ingredient in the change process. Marked differences centered on the urban (Buffalo) versus suburban (Jericho) locations; size differentials; the degree of homogeneity in the community; socioeconomic characteristics, most notably wealth, type of occupation, and level of education; and perceptions of the quality of education.

Background of School Closings: Buffalo

From the outset, the board and the administration in Buffalo changed the focus from a concentration on issues of race, equity, and the neighborhood school, to one of improving the quality of education for all youngsters. They moved debate from a cultural perspective, where issues could

not be resolved, to a political perspective, in which elected officials did not have to speak against school officials and in which elements of good education and techniques for school improvement and issues that could be debated and compromised on could be discussed.

The board consistently pressed for educational solutions and not numerical solutions, as proposed by a variety of groups. Equality and school closings were seen as integral elements in improving the schools and in developing quality education. School officials promised a better education "at the end of the bus ride." They created magnet schools, early childhood centers; and a system in which schools were encouraged to be different and accountable, and in which parents had the power to choose schools that they believed were in the best interests of their children.

Early conflict centered around the desire of varied groups and individuals to keep local schools open. Parents, politicians, teachers,and principals all sought, for varied reasons, to maintain local schools, despite data on age, repairs, costs, and/or quality of education.

Background of School Closings: Jericho

In February 1976, the board passed a resolution to close the Robert Williams school as of June 30, 1977. In November 1976, the community was invited to discuss the results of the survey that had been completed in the Robert Williams area on how best to utilize the closed school and the decision was made to rent the school to a private Jewish group for use as a yeshiva. The decision in December of 1980 to close the Robert Seaman school as of June 1981 was made unanimously by the board after intensive discussion of the District Elementary School Housing Report (12-18-80). It should also be noted that shortly thereafter, the survey process on how to use the school was begun and followed, as in the Robert Williams closing.

In both school closings, the students were merged and not split among varied schools, time was allotted for the merger process, and the local community was surveyed as to potential usage of the school. In the case of the Robert Williams school, there was a continuing strong protest centering on the loss of the neighborhood school, including an appeal to the New York State Commissioner of Education prior to the actual closing. In addition, socioeconomic factors exacerbated the situation.

Many local people felt religious differences as well as economic differences made them most susceptible to closing even though theirs was the newest and most innovative school.

The Robert Seaman school closing was more readily accepted than the Robert Williams school closing had been. Community concerns were expressed about the schools in the merger, Cantiague and Robert Seaman, and the ability to deliver quality programs. There were no formal protests over the closing by any local group.

Change Strategies

Education and Communication: Buffalo

Research sources (Miller, 1988; Murray, 1988; Repa, 1988; Rossell, 1987; Rust, 1988, Winerip, 1985) showed that education and communication with the community and staff about the closing process characterized all phases of the Buffalo education plan. In the later phases of closings, open discussion meetings were held, which led to the creation of committees at each school to develop plans selected from among the available options. All who attended the meetings were given extensive written materials detailing previous actions, court rulings and guidelines, and desegregation methods acceptable to the court. Extensive plans were made in each of the phases, building on the experiences of the previous phases to advertise and promote the educational advantages of the plan (Murray, 1988; Rust, 1988; Winerip, 1985).

Newspaper articles documented the use of the education and communication strategy. The actions were a public relations campaign by the city's Human Relations Commission to educate the community on the plan, and an advertisement for a television show in which the superintendent would discuss issues with the public. In 1980, education and communication continued throughout the year and was documented in various articles.

Education and Communication: Jericho

An examination of district materials and newspaper articles indicated use of this strategy in

Jericho. In February 1970, a citizens advisory group presented an extensive housing study to the board of education and community. The study cited demographics, educational implications, and financial factors. As a result of the study and community reaction, the Robert Williams school was kept open.

In 1976, an Elementary School Housing Study reported that previous reasons for closing a school had been primarily financial and the community had supported keeping Robert Williams open in 1970 and 1973. In 1975, closing Robert Williams school was again extensively discussed, with financial factors still primary. The community agreed to keep the school open. The conclusions of the Elementary School Housing Study indicated the board and administration had restudied the situation and that education was the primary concern. As a result of this study, the board recommended keeping the school open for the 1976-1977 school year and to close it with the merger of the entire school into the Jackson school in September of 1977. An announcement by the board to the community in March 1977 of a meeting on the Jackson Williams merger also exemplified the use of the strategy of education and communication. Board minutes support evidence that substantial information was shared with the community.

Facilitation and Support: Buffalo

There was deep concern for the feelings of the community and staff in Buffalo. Great care was taken by the board and administration to make staff available for parents, to listen to fears and develop realistic solutions, and to give parents and students first-hand opportunities to compare reality with beliefs. To meet parental concerns over safety and the quality of learning, voluntary parent patrols were instituted. Parents knew that someone was always available to answer their questions and to deal with their concerns. Facilitation and support strategies included inservice for teachers, parent and teacher workshops, and availability of staff to deal with special needs and concerns (Miller, 1988; Murray, 1988). In addition, the all-day kindergartens and preschool centers not only helped convince people about the value of the system but met real needs and concerns of working parents.

Facilitation and Support: Jericho

In Jericho, facilitation and support was also found to be a major strategy. Extensive meetings, the availability of the administration, merger committees, joint PTA meetings, student visitation, and joint activities were just some of the steps used. Involvement of local religious figures was also an important part of easing fears.

Concern for the fears and feelings of community members was perhaps best exemplified by the reaction of board members to the Concerned Citizen's Report (1977), which was at direct variance with the board's plan. At that meeting, board members expressed their appreciation for the efforts of the committee, praised the caliber of the work they had done, reassured them about the ability of the board's plans to meet the children's needs, and the board's deep concern on this issue, but indicated that the vote would stand.

Beyond the attempts to bring parents together were the efforts to insure that all the youngsters began to see the move as positive, developed relationships with students and staff of the other school, and had their fears allayed about the students of the other school.

Finally, fears about school usage and the effects on the local community were dealt with in both cases by a poll of the geographic of the local school to be closed and then a poll of leaders around the community as to their reactions to the area residents' decision. In this manner, by identifying and fulfilling community wishes, the concerns and fears of local residents and community representatives about the use of the closed school were allayed prior to the closing.

Participation and Involvement: Buffalo

Research sources (Miller, 1988; Murray, 1988; Repa, 1988; Rust, 1988; Winerip, 1985) described a process in Buffalo that was open and that increasingly involved community members, teachers, and administrators. After 48 planned meetings, committees of teachers and parents, interested citizens, and building administrators were set up at every building. The plans they developed were then submitted, reviewed by staff for feasibility, and included in the final plan as

much as possible. Newspaper articles reflected that ideas were being considered and that people felt involved.

A key factor in Buffalo's success in integrating its schools was that parents and teachers played key roles in designing the system. The plans for early childhood centers, magnet schools, academies, closing plans, a K-8 restructuring, and elimination of middle schools and junior high schools came from the committees at each building. Principals were seen as leaders, not only in developing the plans for the original meetings, but in helping the committees at each building develop and implement their plans. Involvement also meant the ability of parents to select programs for their youngsters based on their philosophy, and for staff at the building level to be the key figures in the development of new programs.

Participation and Involvement: Jericho

Extensive participation and involvement began in 1970 and extended through the final rental of Robert Seaman School in 1983. The Elementary Housing study (1976) showed that in 1973 and 1975 community desires to keep Robert Williams open were supported. Only in 1976, when it was apparent that the program was becoming educationally unsound, did the board vote to close Robert Williams school. The board allowed over a year and a half to manage the transition.

During the closing of the Robert Seaman School, many of the same processes were followed. Discussions on educational options and plans for the merger of Robert Seaman and Cantiague schools were documented in board minutes. A survey on school usage and its eventual rental was handled through the local community first and then the community as a whole.

Thus, the findings reflect involvement in all phases of the closing decision and seem at variance with questionnaire results, discussed later. Perhaps respondents reacted only to the final decision by the board to actually close the school. Newsletters, board interviews, and written materials indicate that community involvement was actively sought. Open meetings, invitations to all key groups and parents for the meetings, community newsletters, and questionnaires were used. District files reflected systematic preparation, careful study, and response to all questions and complaints. Even

after the mergers were accomplished, questionnaires on the status of the situation were distributed and responses to individual complaints made. Any community member who sought a voice in the process was able to gain one.

Negotiation and Agreement: Buffalo

Numerous examples of negotiation and agreement was also found in newspaper articles in 1976. Another incentive was the magnet schools, where more than 1,000 students were on the waiting list for the Waterfront school, with 816 already accepted. A new hot lunch program for all students was made available. A series of newspaper articles said that 20 to 25 schools, mostly in white areas, would be closed and mentioned the varied types of magnet schools that had been created to attract white students to inner city schools. The establishment of magnet schools and the new early childhood centers represented a major attempt to break down opposition and to provide community members with programs of the type and quality they desired.

The incentives for Buffalo's citizens were clear throughout all phases of the closing and became increasingly apparent as success built on success. Improved quality was not only the theme but the growing reality, as documented by myriad sources, and served as the cornerstone on which the change process was built.

Negotiation and Agreement: Jericho

The strategy of negotiation and agreement was seen in decisions on educational programs and the use of closed schools. The administration attempted and ultimately succeeded in renting both schools to elementary schools, which, as the surveys demonstrated, was clearly the first choice of the surrounding community. The community was aware early in the process that the school would be closed and that the school would be used to the maximum degree possible in the manner the community desired. In both cases, schools were closed with a unanimous vote of the board, which represented negotiation and agreement because in a community as small as Jericho, the five board

members typically were very responsive to community needs and each typically represented a different segment of the community. In conclusion, negotiation and agreement, much of it behind the scenes, did play a role in the closing of schools in Jericho, although this strategy was viewed by respondents as as far less significant than it was viewed by respondents in Buffalo.

Manipulation and Co-optation: Both Districts

In both Buffalo and Jericho, little evidence was found in newspapers and other written accounts to demonstrate the use of this strategy. In both districts, one or two interviews indicated that some residents were co-opted by obtaining jobs in the school system. There was, however, no clear documented evidence of the use of this strategy in either case.

Explicit and Implicit Coercion: Buffalo

The major example of coercion that can be documented in Buffalo was the role of the court and not the actions of the administration and board. In 1976, coercion was reflected in two key areas: court rulings and program maintenance. Coercion through the court decisions continued to play a role and was perhaps most clearly seen in an article in the Buffalo Evening News (6-20-76) in which Judge Curtin detailed the impact of the school integration plan he had approved. Coercion in Buffalo was also reflected in one of the interviews for this study, in which the role of building principals was discussed. The respondent indicated that when it became apparent that certain principals were sabotaging the project in an effort to keep their own schools open, they were clearly told of the repercussions for their non-support. In Jericho, the only coercion, if it can indeed be so labeled, was the threat of deteriorating educational quality if the two schools were kept open.

In conclusion, in both Jericho and Buffalo, varied sources supported the finding that the strategy of explicit or implicit coercion was neither perceived as used very much nor was it actually used to any great extent.

Level of Conflict

Analysis of responses to the questionnaire was the first step in the assessment of the level of conflict. In Buffalo, six respondents saw the level of opposition unchanged from when they first learned of the possibility until the final decision was made, three saw it as slightly changed (moved only one step down on the scale), and six saw it as significantly changed (moved two or more steps down the scale).

In Jericho, eight respondents saw the level of conflict as unchanged, five saw it as slightly changed, and four said the level of conflict was significantly changed. In both districts, those who saw little or no change predominated. Based on these responses, one would, therefore, question the degree to which the use of specific strategies affected the level of conflict. However, several other factors should be noted. First, there was no significant unrest leading to drastic changes in board membership or top administrative positions. Second, interviews and written data showed that beginning in the first year after the change, levels of opposition subsided. Especially in Buffalo, there was almost universal support for the results of the change and growing praise for the management of that change. Third, virtually all of the respondents (15 from each district) indicated significantly lower opposition in subsequent closings, with more concentration on programmatic issues as opposed to the neighborhood school issue. Furthermore, the respondents to the questionnaire were those most deeply involved in the process, parents and staff in the area of the closed school in particular, and therefore, expectations were, as Rea (1983) indicated, that they would be most strongly opposed.

These findings are strengthened when compared with the tremendous upheaval in Clarkstown, New York (Orloff, 1984), which included major shifts in board membership, violent confrontations, superintendent change, and controversy over rehiring the superintendent, to mention just a few of the deleterious effects. It should be noted that major complaints of those in opposition included a lack of communication, belief that the closings would negatively affect educational quality, a feeling that they were not involved, and that, except for minor fiscal gains, there were no real benefits to the

change (Orloff, 1984).

The reactions of the superintendent and assistant superintendent in Buffalo, reported in newspapers, strengthened the assumption about the relatively low level of conflict. Clearly, moving the focus to quality education and carrying out that promise enabled Buffalo to move through successive phases, gaining support from residents whose children's education had qualitatively improved in previous phases.

In both districts, the reported level of conflict and the perceived level of conflict were at variance, with the reported level significantly below the perceived level. It thus appeared that the strategies used significantly affected the level of opposition.

Socioeconomic Factors

Buffalo is an urban district, whereas Jericho is a suburban district. The districts also differ in size, wealth, and homogeneity. Yet, in both cases the same four strategies, always with an emphasis on educational quality, helped to limit conflict and ultimately resulted in positive reactions. Variations in the degree of use of each strategy seemed based on other factors surrounding the individual closing or closings rather than socioeconomic differences in each district. The similarities in strategy usage and effect can be noted even though the communities were as different from each other as Jericho and Buffalo were. A further question in relation to the strategies and to the socioeconomic makeup of the two districts in this current study was: How could the results of previous studies be so different from the results of this study? It appeared that certain nuances had to be sought for the answer to that question.

Whatever the specific technique, communication and involvement was apparently a key strategy. Whether through the process of negotiation and agreement, which most felt was heavily used in Buffalo and less used in Jericho, or through participation and involvement, the concept remained the same. Furthermore, the strategies appeared to be more heavily dependent on whether the closings were early or late closings, as in the degree to which facilitation and support were necessary. Therefore, based upon community differences, it may well be that the type of open

strategy used, as opposed to whether or not to use an open strategy, is the issue. In sum, a) the strategy of education and communication is essential in both types of community, b) the degree of facilitation and support may be dependent on whether it is an earlier or a later closing, and c) the type of community influences whether participation and involvement or negotiation and agreement is used.

Emotional Factors

The findings of earlier research (Boyd, 1979; Boyd & Wheaton, 1983) seem to have been corroborated. There were emotional reactions and, despite the reality of the need to close schools, people sought to keep their local schools open. The reactions of local residents were most strongly oppositional, as indicated by responses to the questionnaire and the interview, archival research, and newspaper articles. It was clear that the geographic area in which the school was being closed, and which was most affected by the consolidation, required the most intensive attention. This does not preclude or deny involvement of the entire community, but stresses the fact that those people most directly involved needed to feel as if they had a major voice in the process. Furthermore, they were the very people, both community members and youngsters, who were most in need of the strategy of facilitation and support.

Statistical Analyses

Responses to the questionnaire for each district were subjected to Pearson Product-moment correlation to determine, at the .05 confidence level, the strength of the association between the degree of opposition and each of Kotter and Schlesinger's (1974) six strategies. This was done in each experimental site for the degree of a) opposition when the possibility was first learned of and b) when the final decision was made.

In Buffalo, no significant association between any one of the strategies and a degree of opposition when the closing was first learned of. The results for Jericho indicated no significant association between any one of the strategies and a degree of opposition when the closing was first learned of.

The results for Buffalo showed no significant association between any one of the strategies and the degree of opposition when the final decision to close the school was made. The results for Jericho indicated no significant association between any one of the strategies and the degree of opposition when the final decision to close the school was made. In all four of these measurements, the degree of association was affected by the similarity in the responses to the degree of opposition thus producing a truncated range for that variable.

The second step in the statistical analysis was to use Fisher's Z transformation to estimate relationships between and within the two sets of responses of Buffalo and Jericho for each of the six strategies and the degree of opposition to the closings, both first learned and final decision. There was no significant difference between the degree of association of each of the strategies and the degree of opposition between Buffalo and Jericho. This was found true for when the closing was first learned of and when the final decision was made. Second, there was no significant difference in the strength of the relationship within each district between each of the six strategies and the degree of opposition when the closing was first learned of and when the final decision was made.

Overall, the statistical analyses demonstrated no significant differences for the relationships within or between districts for each of the six strategies in relation to a) opposition when the strategy was first learned of, b) opposition when the final decision was made, c) the strength of the relationship between findings for each of the districts, and d) the strength of the relationship between correlations of when the decision was first learned of and when the final decision was announced.

The questionnaire responses were examined by two series of analysis of variance to analyze a) the effect of the district and respondent's position and b) the interaction of district and respondent's position. In the first series of analyses, position was defined as school district administrator, school staff member, or person from the community. In the second series, administrators and staff members were combined into one group, school personnel, which was then compared to the responses of community members. The findings indicated no significant differences in main effects except in the district-by-district comparison for a) participation and involvement and negotiation and agreement when the ANOVA was computed with three groups and b) for negotiation and agreement when the

ANOVA was computed with the two groups. There was no significant difference for any factor within a district in the main effect at the .05 level.

An examination of the average means in each case where significance was found indicated a stronger perception of the usage of that factor in Buffalo than in Jericho, especially in the strategy of negotiation and agreement. The complete source tables for these analyses are found in the data base, available from the authors to interested readers.

In conclusion, the data revealed no statistically significant differences between or among any of the groups in either district in their perceptions of the use of any of the six strategies or of the level of opposition when the changes were first learned of or when the final decision was made. The only statistically significant difference was between districts on the perceived use of two strategies: negotiation and agreement and participation and involvement.

Conclusions

Given the above findings, the following conclusions in answer to the research questions of this study are justified:

1. When the strategy of education and communication was perceived and/or reported as very much or moderately used by a majority of selected respondents from a school district, the perceived and/or reported level of conflict was lower.
2. When the strategy of participation and involvement was was perceived and/or reported as very much or moderately used by a majority of selected respondents from a school district, the perceived and/or reported level of conflict was lower.
3. When the strategy of facilitation and support was perceived and/or reported as very much or moderately used by a majority of selected respondents from a school district, the perceived and/or reported level of conflict was lower.
4. When the strategy of negotiations and agreement was perceived and/or reported as very much or moderately used by a majority of selected respondents from a school district, the perceived and/or reported level of conflict was lower.

5. When the strategy of manipulation and co-optation was perceived and/or reported as very much or moderately used by a majority of selected respondents from a school district, the perceived and/or reported level of conflict was not lower.
6. When the strategy of explicit and implicit coercion was perceived and/or reported as very much or moderately used by a majority of selected respondents from a school district, the perceived and/or reported level of conflict was not lower.

Two districts, widely disparate in many factors, managed change and emerged in many ways stronger than they had previously been, particularly in the case of Buffalo. The districts maintained or heightened community support, based on their use of the four strategies of openness: education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, and negotiation and agreement. The strategies of manipulation and cooptation and implicit and explicit coercion, which reflect authoritarian behaviors, seem to have had little effect. Based on analysis of the interviews, district materials, and newspaper articles on the events in both districts, these four open strategies were most effective in managing change, reducing conflict, and continued and/or heightened support of the board and the administration by the community.

The questionnaire results indicated no perceptible difference in perceptions of the level of opposition to school closing when people first learned of the closing possibility and when the final decision to close was made. This was true of both Buffalo and Jericho and would appear to suggest that the strategies were not effective. However, somewhat after that initial decision, even shortly into the following year, there already was a positive and marked change in attitude. This can be attributed to the allaying of fears in the community about exactly what the change would bring and about what the effects on the community would be due to the loss of their neighborhood school. Although many residents remained upset over the closing of schools, there was in both districts the realization that changes had to be made, acceptance of the fact that educational quality was maintained or improved, and the knowledge that virtually everything was done to meet community needs.

Buffalo implemented major improvements in the quality of programs. Jericho already had and

continued to maintain high quality education. Schools were disposed of in a way that allayed the worst fears of the community as to the use of those sites. (It should also be noted that the early involvement in that process and the eventual resolution of school use in the manner selected as the first priority of the community had a positive effect on the feelings of many individuals.) Therefore, it can be concluded that within the paradigm designed by Kotter and Schlesinger (1974), the four strategies stressing openness seemed to have had a major positive effect on the reactions of individuals. In future stressful situations those strategies should be the dominant ones used by boards of education and administrators.

The interviews, particularly in Buffalo, showed that a strategy not recognized by Kotter and Schlesinger was a significant factor: educational quality. Both districts had consistently used the strategy of maintaining that educational quality was their primary goal. As a result, the question has to be raised as to whether or not this strategy, i.e., the idea that educational quality was the primary reason for closings, might not indeed have been the one factor that superseded all others.

On the other hand, it is quite conceivable that this strategy complemented rather than replaced the other strategies and may even be unique to the world of education and, therefore, not relevant to Kotter and Schlesinger's original paradigm, which was designed for managing change in a business environment. In the educational environments of this current research, the strategy of openness, coupled with a concentration on an improvement in educational quality, was most effective in reducing conflict and in producing heightened support for the actions of the administration and the board of education.